

07-28-00

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UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR 1.53(b))

Attorney Docket No.: 2937-18

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Express Mail Label No.: EL 610763437 US

Title: "PROMPT COUPON REIMBURSEMENT AFTER COUPON REDEMPTION"

Assistant Commissioner for Patents

Box Patent Application

Washington, DC 20231

Enclosed for filing with the above-identified utility patent application, please find the following:

1. Specification (Total Pages of Text, including Abstract and Claims: 37)
2. Drawing(s) (35 USC 113) (Total Sheets: 9) FORMAL INFORMAL
3. Oath or Declaration (Total Pages: 2) Signed Unsigned
4. Assignment Papers (*cover sheet & document(s)*)
5. Power of Attorney
6. Information Disclosure Statement (IDS/PTO-1449)
7. Copies of IDS Citations (Number of References: 4)
8. Return Postcard (MPEP 503) (*should be specifically itemized*)
9. Small Entity Statement(s)
10. A check in the amount of \$444.00 is enclosed.

	(COL. 1) NO. FILED		(COL. 2*) NO. EXTRA	SMALL ENTITY			LARGE ENTITY	
				RATE	FEE		RATE	FEE
BASIC FEE:					\$345.00	OR		\$690.00
TOTAL CLAIMS:	31	-	20	11	X \$9 =	\$99.00	OR	X \$18 =
INDEP. CLAIMS:	3	-	3	0	X \$39 =	\$0.00	OR	X \$78 =
MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIMS					+ \$130 =	\$0.00	OR	+\$260 =
*IF THE DIFFERENCE IN COL. 2 IS LESS THAN ZERO, ENTER "0" IN COL. 2.				TOTAL:	\$444.00			

1. The Commissioner is hereby authorized to debit any underpayments or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 19-1970.
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Respectfully Submitted,

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Date: July 26, 2000

**VERIFIED STATEMENT (DECLARATION) CLAIMING SMALL ENTITY STATUS
(37 CFR 1.9(f) and 1.27(c)) - SMALL BUSINESS CONCERN**

I hereby declare that I am an official empowered to act on behalf of the small business concern, In-Store Media Systems, Inc. of 15423 E. Batavia Dr., Aurora, Colorado 80011.

I hereby declare that the above-identified small business concern qualifies as a small business concern as defined in 13 CFR 121.3-18, and reproduced in 37 CFR 1.9(d), for purposes of paying reduced fees under section 41(a) and (b) of Title 35, United States Code, in that the number of employees of the concern, including those of its affiliates, does not exceed 500 persons. For purposes of this statement, (1) the number of employees of the business concern is the average over the previous fiscal year of the concern of the persons employed on a full-time, part-time or temporary basis during each of the pay periods of the fiscal year, and (2) concerns are affiliates of each other when either, directly or indirectly, one concern controls or has the power to control the other, or a third party or parties controls or has the power to control both.

I hereby declare that rights under contract or law have been conveyed to and remain with the small business concern identified above with regard to the invention, entitled "PROMPT COUPON REIMBURSEMENT AFTER COUPON REDEMPTION" and identified as Attorney File No. 2937-18, described in the specification filed herewith.

If the rights held by the above-identified small business concern are not exclusive, each individual, concern or organization having rights to the invention is listed below* and no rights to the invention are held by any person, other than the inventor, who could not qualify as a small business concern under 37 CFR 1.9(c) or by any concern which would not qualify as a small business concern under 37 CFR 1.9(d) or a nonprofit organization under 37 CFR 1.9(e).

*NOTE: Separate verified statements are required from each named person, concern or organization having rights to the invention averring to their status as small entities. (37 CFR 1.27)

NAME N/A -- DO NOT FILL IN

ADDRESS N/A -- DO NOT FILL IN

INDIVIDUAL SMALL BUSINESS CONCERN

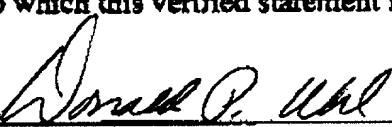
NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

I acknowledge the duty to file, in this application or patent, notification of any change in status resulting in loss of entitlement to small entity status prior to paying, or at the time of paying, the earliest of the issue fee or any maintenance fee due after the date on which status as a small entity is no longer appropriate. (37 CFR 1.28(b))

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under section 101 of Title 18 of the United States Code, and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application, any patent issuing thereon, or any patent to which this verified statement is directed.

Date: 7-25-00

By:


Donald P. Uhl
President and CEO
15423 E. Batavia Dr.
Aurora, Colorado 80011

PROMPT COUPON REIMBURSEMENT AFTER COUPON REDEMPTION

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present application relates to systems for tracking customer purchase transactions. In particular, the present invention relates to systems for accurately tracking the use of coupons redeemed by consumers, and for promptly reimbursing retailers for discounts extended to consumers in exchange for coupons presented to the retailer.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Coupons are typically distributed to consumers by consumer packaged goods manufacturers (PGM) as a marketing tool to encourage consumers to purchase their products.

The coupons are distributed to consumers through any one of a number of different channels,

10 including through newspapers as freestanding insert (FSI) coupons, advertising circulars, direct mailings, e-mail, and the Internet. To redeem a coupon, a consumer must generally present the coupon in connection with the purchase of a product identified on the coupon at a retail establishment. The retailer, upon receiving the coupon, will deduct the face value of the coupon from the total amount owed by the consumer. The retailer generally does not
15 receive reimbursement for the discount extended to the consumer until the redeemed coupon has been subjected to a lengthy retailer redemption verification process.

In order to verify the legitimacy of discounts extended to consumers by retailers, product manufacturers generally require retailers to provide them with the original redeemed coupons in support of invoices seeking reimbursement. Accordingly, retailers typically

bundle together redeemed coupons and ship them to third party clearinghouses, which sort the redeemed coupons by product manufacturer. The sorted coupons, together with the retailer invoices, are then shipped to a manufacturer's agent. The manufacturer's agent, which in some instances may be associated with a clearinghouse, attempts to determine

5 whether the invoice amount is supported by the redeemed coupons. In addition, the manufacturer's agent typically examines the redeemed coupons for evidence of fraud, which may be indicated by a large number of evenly cut coupons or by counterfeit coupons. The manufacturer's agent then may issue a check to the retailer through the clearinghouse as reimbursement for the value of the coupons verified by the agent as genuine. Any invoiced

10 amount that is not adequately supported by the provided original coupons will not be paid by the manufacturer or its agent. Retailers often respond to such "chargebacks" by deducting the amount of the chargeback from amounts paid to the product manufacturers for products delivered to the retailer. Where a check is issued for the retailer, it is generally not received until six to eight weeks after the original discount was extended to the consumer by the

15 retailer. Accordingly, the redemption of manufacturer coupons requires retailers to forego receipt of full value for items purchased using a coupon for a significant period of time.

In addition to the significant time delays involved in the processing of coupons using traditional methods, such methods are also vulnerable to fraud and do not provide product manufacturers with timely marketing data. For instance, there is no way for a manufacturer

20 to precisely determine whether the redemption of a coupon was accompanied by a bona fide product sale. This is because traditional methods of coupon redemption do not correlate a specific product sale to each specific redeemed coupon at the time of redemption at the store.

The redeemed coupons are not segregated according to the store at which they were redeemed and there is no accurate data that correlates coupons and sales of products.

Instead, manufacturers have only a general idea of the volume of product sales expected for particular retail chains. Accordingly, fraud can usually only be detected by product

5 manufacturers if it is carried out on a large scale. Additionally, product manufacturers do not receive timely or accurate marketing data using traditional coupon redemption and verification methods. This is because coupons are often bundled together by retail chain rather than by a particular retail outlet. In addition, the manufacturer receives no information regarding the date and place of redemption, or regarding the precise products or product

10 configuration purchased in connection with the redemption of the coupon.

For the above stated reasons, it would be beneficial, as supported by the Joint Industry Coupon Council (JICC), to enhance the redemption of coupons, particularly providing for prompt reimbursement to retailers for discounts extended by them to consumers. Furthermore, it would be advantageous to provide the issuers of coupons with
15 accurate and timely information concerning the circumstances of the coupon redemption and to enable the issuer to verify the validity of coupon redemptions. In addition, it would be advantageous to provide such a method and apparatus that can be implemented at an acceptable cost and that is operated by a third party who is trustworthy and reliable.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with the present invention, a system for accurately tracking the use of coupons and for promptly reimbursing retailers for discounts extended in exchange for such coupons is provided. The disclosed system generally includes a coupon redemption subsystem interconnected to a point-of-sale (POS) subsystem by a communications channel.

- 5 In one embodiment, a passive tap from the POS controller is employed. The system can record the same transactions as the retailer does. A transaction log is generated that enables the system to provide coupon information and product UPC information. The POS subsystem can include a main computer or server of the retailer that commonly communicates with a number of check-out stations at which products are purchased, such
- 10 as grocery items offered by a supermarket retailer. Each check-out station includes a cash drawer or electronic cash register (ECR), together with a product scanner. The product scanner reads the UPC (universal product code) on the product as part of the check-out procedure. In general, the coupon redemption subsystem is adapted to interface with this point-of-sale subsystem to receive information regarding the sale of products and any
- 15 associated discounts (e.g. coupons being redeemed) from the point-of-sale subsystem. In addition, the coupon redemption subsystem is adapted to store information associated with redeemed coupons and to attempt to match that information to product sale and discount information downloaded from the point-of-sale subsystem.

In operation, information regarding product sales and discounts is entered into the
20 point-of-sale subsystem by retailer personnel. Coupons redeemed in connection with consumer transactions are collected by the retailer personnel. According to one embodiment

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of the present invention, the redeemed coupons are input and stored in a secure container (e.g. a safe or lock box) that is not accessible to retailer personnel.

A suitable number of such redeemed coupons are collected by the retailer. The suitable number is based on a plurality of different customer transactions with the retailer

5 typically occurring throughout a day, week or other acceptable time interval. After being collected and placed in the secure container, coupon verification personnel, preferably a third party not affiliated with the retailer, remove the coupons and cause coupon information to be input into the coupon redemption subsystem. The coupon information is input using a reader, scanner, or other coupon information input device that is separate and different from

10 the scanner or input device of the point-of-sale subsystem. This information is also stored in the coupon redemption subsystem. Information regarding product sales and discounts extended by the retailer to consumers in connection with product sales is downloaded from the point-of-sale subsystem to the coupon redemption subsystem. The download may occur as an automatic transfer of files at periodic intervals including real time or substantially real

15 time, or as a transfer of files prior to the verification of coupon redemptions by the coupon verification personnel. This download may occur over the communications channel, or may be accomplished by transferring a removable storage medium from the point-of-sale subsystem to the coupon redemption subsystem. In yet a further alternative, information from the point-of-sale subsystem may be transferred to the coupon redemption subsystem

20 in real time.

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After the information relating to redeemed coupons has been entered into the coupon redemption subsystem, and sales information has been downloaded from the point-of-sale subsystem, the coupon redemption subsystem establishes matches between the redeemed coupons and product sales. In connection with those coupons for which a match is successfully made, payment is made to the retailer in the amount of the face value of the coupon. Payment may be made to the retailer by check, electronic funds transfer, or other mutually acceptable payment. According to one embodiment, payment is made by a check printed using the coupon redemption subsystem before the coupon verification personnel leave the retailer premises. With respect to making of the payment of coupons that have been properly redeemed and verified, such payment is usually made within three days and preferably within one day (e.g., same day) of a proper coupon being redeemed by the retailer. Coupons not cleared or unverified may later be cleared for payment, although such payment is made after a considerably longer period of time. In no event is such a payment for verified coupons made more than ten days from the redemption of that coupon which is being reimbursed. In that regard, a single payment to the retailer typically handles or covers a significant number of redeemed coupons that are a result of coupon transactions with a number of different customers. For example, the payment to the retailer can cover coupon redemptions involving at least ten different customers. Prior to or concurrent with payment to the retailer, ownership of such redeemed coupons is transferred from the retailer to the coupon verification personnel so that ownership rights in the reimbursed coupons can pass to this third party from the retailer before these coupons are allowed to be transferred or moved from the retailer's facility.

Information collected concerning the redemption of coupons is provided to both the retailer and the product manufacturers whose coupons have been redeemed. In particular, the retailer is provided with a summary of coupons redeemed including product information represented by the bar code, in connection with all product manufacturers and the particular product associated with the redemption. Each product manufacturer is provided with information concerning the redemption of coupons it has authorized and correlated with sales of its products. This information may include the location, date and time of the product sales, and where available, information concerning the individual consumer. This information may be made available to the manufacturer over a computer network, such as the Internet, and may be made available in substantially real time.

Additional advantages of the present invention will become readily apparent from the following discussion, particularly when taken together with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a coupon redemption system according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a block diagram of a point of sale system useable with an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 3 is a block diagram of a coupon redemption system according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 4 is a flow chart illustrating the major steps taken in redeeming coupons according to the system of the present invention;

Fig. 5 is a flow chart of the operation of a coupon redemption system according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 6 is a flow chart of the coupon verification process according to an embodiment of the present invention;

5 **Fig. 7** is a representative example of a retailer report, release and check in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 8 is a flow chart representing the flow of information concerning coupons redeemed according to an embodiment of the present invention; and

10 **Fig. 9** is representative of an invoice to a manufacturer by a third party coupon verifier for coupons purchased by the third party verifier from a retailer.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Fig. 1 illustrates a coupon redemption system **100**. The coupon redemption system **100** generally includes an auxiliary computer or coupon redemption subsystem **104**, a communications channel **108** and a point of sale (POS) subsystem **112**. The system **100** may also include a second communications channel **116**, which may be used to interconnect the coupon redemption subsystem **104** to a coupon redemption authority **120** and/or to a data center **124**.

The communications channel **108** serves to transfer information between the coupon 20 redemption subsystem **104** and the point of sale subsystem **112**. Accordingly, the communications channel **108** may comprise a computer network, such as a local area network (LAN), for example an Ethernet network, or a wide area network (WAN), for

example the Internet or a token ring configuration or any other acceptable communication setup and/or protocol. The channel **108** may also comprise standard or proprietary serial or parallel type interconnections. The channel **108** cooperates with appropriate communications interfaces **216** and **316** provided as part of the point of sale **112** and coupon redemption **104** subsystems respectively.

In general the point of sale subsystem is used to track sales of retail goods to consumers. **Fig. 2** represents a point of sale subsystem **112** useable with the coupon redemption subsystem **104** of the present invention. In general, the point of sale subsystem **112** includes a server **200** having associated storage **204**, memory **208** and a processor **212**.

10 In addition, the server **200** may include communications **216** and peripheral **220** interfaces as required by the particular communications channel **108** and peripheral devices interconnected to the server **200**. In a typical point of sale subsystem **112**, the server **200** includes an Intel Pentium™ class processor **212** with a suitable hard disk and/or tape drive as the storage **204** and 64 Mb of solid state memory **208**.

15 The peripheral devices associated with the point of sale subsystem **112** may include a display **224**, such as a cathode ray tube or flat panel type display, and any one of a variety of input/output devices **228**. The input/output devices **228** may include a printer **232**, a scanner **236**, a keyboard **240**, a mouse **244** and a scale **248**. The subsystem **112** may also be interconnected to a cash drawer **252**.

20 In operation, the point of sale subsystem **112** is used to record sales of items to consumers. Accordingly, information regarding each product sold to a consumer is entered into the point of sale subsystem **112** using one or more of the input/output devices **228**. For

example, a cashier at a check-out station or point of sale may read a universal product code (UPC) using the scanner **236**. The information read from the UPC may then be stored in the computer storage **204** of the server **200**. If the consumer presents a coupon associated with the product, the cashier may discount the amount due from the consumer by the face value
5 of the coupon. The value of the coupon may be entered into the point of sale subsystem **112** by scanning a bar code from the coupon using the scanner **236**, a separate scanner, reader or other input device, or the cashier may enter the information manually by, for example, entering the amount of the discount using the keyboard **240**. Information regarding redeemed coupons or discounts entered by the cashier may also be stored in the computer
10 storage **204**. As can be appreciated, there is usually a number of check-out stations. At each check-out station, a cashier is involved with checking out products being purchased and redeeming associated coupons for one or more of such products. Each of the check-out stations typically has its own scanner for handling the sales of products having UPCs. Each such scanner, and/or another coupon reader separate from the scanner, is used to input
15 coupon information to the server **200**.

Fig. 3 is a block diagram representing the coupon redemption subsystem **104**. As shown in **Fig. 3**, the coupon redemption subsystem **104** includes a central processing unit (CPU) **300** having data or information storage **304**, program memory **308** and a processor **312**. The CPU **300** may also include communications interfaces **316** and peripheral
20 interfaces **320**. Peripheral devices associated with the coupon redemption subsystem **104** may include a display **324**, such as a cathode ray tube (CRT) or flat panel display, including a touch screen type display, and various input/output devices **328**. The input/output devices

328 may include a printer **332**, a scanner **336**, a keyboard **340**, and a mouse or other pointing device **344**.

In general, at least one of the communications interfaces **316** cooperates with the communications channel **108** and at least one of the communications interfaces **216** of the point of sale subsystem **112** to pass information between the coupon redemption subsystem **104** and the point of sale subsystem **112**. As noted above, the communications channel **108** may comprise a variety of channel types. In particular, where the communications channel **108** comprises a conventional local or wide area network, the communications interfaces **216** and **316** may comprise appropriate network interface cards. Where the channel **108** comprises a hard wired serial (*e.g.*, RS 232 or USB) or parallel (*e.g.*, SPP or EPP) interconnection, the communications interfaces **216** and **316** may comprise the ports conventionally provided on the CPU **300** or server **200**. The communications network **108** may also comprise the public switched telephone network (PSTN), in which case the communications interfaces **216** and **316** may comprise modems. Where the communications channel **108** comprises the Internet, the communications interfaces **216** and **316** may comprise whatever interface is required by the coupon redemption subsystem **104** or the point-of-sale subsystem **112** to establish a connection to the Internet. It should be appreciated that any combination of communications channel **108** types may be utilized, and that the communications interface **216** of the point-of-sale system **112** need not be the same as the communications interface **316** of the coupon redemption subsystem **104**. For example, the communications interface **316** of the coupon redemption subsystem **104** may comprise a modem for interconnecting the coupon redemption subsystem **104** and an Internet server

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(not shown), while the communications interface **216** of the point-of-sale system **112** may comprise a network card for interconnecting the point-of-sale subsystem **112** over a local area network to a server or router (not shown) in communication with the Internet. Accordingly, in the above example, the communications channel **108** comprises the PSTN, 5 the Internet and a local area network.

In addition to conventional techniques for interconnecting computers such as those discussed above, the coupon redemption subsystem **104** and point-of-sale subsystem **112** may be interconnected by a proprietary type communications channel **108**. Of course, the communications interfaces **216** and **316** need to be appropriate to the communications 10 channel **108** utilized. For example, the coupon redemption subsystem **104** may “listen in” to activity occurring on the point-of-sale subsystem **112**, and make a record of that activity in real time. Such monitoring of the point-of-sale subsystem **112** requires interfaces **216** and/or **316** that are capable of detecting the activity to be monitored and translating that activity into a signal that can be understood by the coupon redemption subsystem **104**. The 15 information monitored on the point-of-sale subsystem **112** may include information stored in the storage **204** of the point-of-sale subsystem **112** as part of the operation of the point-of-sale subsystem **112**. Alternatively, information transferred between the various input/output devices **228** and the server **200** of the point-of-sale subsystem **112** may be monitored by the coupon redemption subsystem **104** and stored in storage **304**.

20 From the above discussion, it should be appreciated that information may be transferred from the point-of-sale subsystem **112** to the coupon redemption subsystem **104** either in batches, or in real-time. Additionally, it should be appreciated that the

communications channel **108** may serve to continuously interconnect the coupon redemption subsystem **104** to the point-of-sale subsystem **112**. Alternatively, the channel **108**, whether physical or virtual, may interconnect the coupon redemption subsystem **104** to the point-of-sale subsystem **112** only when transfers of information are taking place. In addition to the

5 communications channel **108** interconnecting the coupon redemption subsystem **104** to the point of sale subsystem **112**, a second communications channel **116** may be provided to interconnect the coupon redemption subsystem **104** to a coupon redemption authority **120** and/or to a data center **124**.

The coupon redemption subsystem **104** may be configured such that it is easily

10 portable. When so configured, coupon verification personnel may carry the coupon redemption subsystem **104** with them to each retailer location. Alternatively, the coupon redemption subsystem **104** may be kept in a back office or other area of the retail location at which the coupons are deemed. In another embodiment, the coupon redemption subsystem **104** may be maintained off-site from the premises of the retail location at which

15 coupons are being redeemed. For example, the coupon redemption subsystem **104** may be at a facility under the control of the coupon verification third party or entity, which location may receive redeemed coupons from one or more different retailers. Accordingly, the coupon redemption subsystem **104** is not located at the check-out station or other area where products are being purchased. The coupon redemption subsystem **104** is usually located at

20 least twenty feet away from at least one check-out station of the retailer, who is utilizing or relying on the services associated with the coupon redemption subsystem **104**. Where the coupon redemption subsystem **104** is to remain at the retailer location, it may be provided

with an integrated secure storage container (e.g. a safe or lock box) for holding redeemed coupons until the proper redemption of those coupons can be verified by coupon verification personnel.

With reference now to **Fig. 4**, the major operational steps taken in redeeming coupons according to the present invention are illustrated. Initially, at step **400**, a record is made of products sold to a consumer during a transaction in the point of sale subsystem **112**. In addition, a record is made of any discounts provided by the retailer in connection with the transaction such as those associated with redeemed coupons. These records may be stored in the storage **204** associated with the point of sale subsystem **112**. These steps are generally taken by the retailer in the normal course of completing a sale. As should be understood, such records being made related to coupons or other discounts and products being purchased are commonly conducted at each of a number of check-out stations. Regarding coupon transactions, these entail a number of different customers with one or more coupons that are redeemed over a definable time interval. Accordingly, the storage **204** keeps track of product purchases and coupons being redeemed by a number of check-out stations involving a number of different customer purchases or transactions.

At step **404**, third party verification of the proper redemption of any coupons associated with a transaction is made using the coupon redemption subsystem **104**, as will be discussed in more detail below. Next, at step **408**, the retailer is reimbursed for discounts provided to consumers as a result of the proper redemption of coupons. At step **412**, a report is provided to each product manufacturer whose coupons have been redeemed. The report provides various information concerning the circumstances of the coupon redemptions in

connection with each manufacturer's products. Each manufacturer then makes payment to the third party verification provider in the amount of the reimbursements made to retailers attributable to coupons issued and/or authorized by each product manufacturer, plus a customary handling fee (step 416).

5 **Fig. 5** is a flow chart illustrating the steps of recording sales information (step 400), third party verification of proper coupon redemption (step 404) and payment of verified coupon amounts to the retailer (step 408) illustrated generally in **Fig. 4**. Initially, at step 500, the sale of a product is entered into the point of sale subsystem 112. The information entered regarding the sale of a product may include such particulars as the product code, batch
10 number, date of manufacture and/or expiration, product size and/or packaging configuration, etc. Information concerning the location of the retailer and information concerning the identity of the consumer may also be stored in connection with the sale of the product, as well as the date and time the transaction was completed. The information recorded concerning the sale of the product may be stored in the storage 204 associated with the server
15 **200** of the point of sale subsystem 112.

The cashier may then, at step 504, enter information concerning any coupons or discounts associated with the sale of a product. For instance, the cashier may enter simply the amount of the discount manually by, for instance, typing that information using the keyboard 240 of the point of sale subsystem 112. Such discount information may or may not
20 be associated with the collection of a coupon authorized by a manufacturer. Therefore, it will be appreciated that a valid coupon is not necessary in order for a cashier to issue a discount using a typical point of sale subsystem 112. Where a discount is associated with

a manufacturer authorized coupon, information regarding the discount may also be entered by scanning a bar code provided on the coupon using the scanner **236**, by reading coupon information using a coupon reader or other input device, or by manually entering information identifying the coupon. The cashier may also simply enter the amount of the discount
5 provided to the consumer. After the products sold and any discounts have been entered into the point of sale system, payment of the total amount due, plus any taxes or other charges, but less the amount of any discounts entered, is collected from the consumer by the retailer (step **508**). Where coupons are associated with the transaction, they are collected by the cashier and placed in a secure storage container or otherwise collected for later verification
10 (step **512**). Preferably, a secure storage container is used that allows only the third party verification service provider to access the redeemed coupons following a number of customer transactions or following the cashier's shift. For example, access to the redeemed coupons in the secure container may be made at periodic intervals, such as greater than three hours. Such access or subsequently utilizing the coupon redemption subsystem **104** involves
15 more than one customer. For example, use of the coupon redemption subsystem **104** by coupon verification personnel involves at least ten customers, each of which redeemed at least one coupon.

The secure storage container(s), having the redeemed coupons, is (are) available to coupon verification personnel at step **516**. In general, the coupon verification personnel visit
20 retailer locations periodically in order to verify and otherwise process redeemed coupons. Where the volume of redeemed coupons at a retailer location is sufficiently high, for example 500 or more redeemed coupons per day, the coupon verification personnel preferably travel

to the retailer location daily to perform the verification procedure. Where coupon volumes do not warrant daily visits by coupon verification personnel, those visits may be less frequent.

At step **520**, the records of product sales collected at step **500** are downloaded to the
5 coupon redemption computer or server **300**. This download of information may be
accomplished in any one of a number of ways. For example, the information may be
downloaded from the point of sale subsystem **112** after the coupon verification personnel
have arrived at the retailer location. Alternatively, sales records may be downloaded in
batches to the coupon redemption system **104** automatically, either at predetermined time
10 intervals or after the occurrence of predetermined events. As a further example, the coupon
redemption system **104** may monitor activity occurring in the point of sale subsystem **112**
and automatically record sales information in real time. Although the download of
information typically occurs over the communications channel **108**, it may also be performed
by a manual transfer of files containing the information to be downloaded. For example, a
15 removable storage medium, such as a floppy disk, may be used to transfer information from
the point of sale subsystem **112** to the coupon redemption subsystem **104**.

At step **524**, the coupon verification personnel retrieve the redeemed coupons from
the secure storage container, and enter coupon identifying information into the coupon
redemption subsystem **104**. The identifying information may be entered into the coupon
20 redemption subsystem **104** by reading information from the coupons using the scanner **336**
or a coupon reader that might be controlled to destroy (e.g. shredding), or otherwise render
unuseable, the coupon after it has been verified or accepted. Alternatively, identifying

information may be entered manually, such as by using the keyboard **340**. Information may be stored in the storage **304**, and may include all of the identifying information encoded on the coupon, such as the face value, the product the coupon applies to, the expiration date of the coupon and information concerning the distribution method and/or recipient of the
5 coupon.

It should be noted that steps **520** and **524** may be taken in any order with respect to one another, or they may be taken concurrently. Following the completion of steps **520** and **524**, the redeemed coupons are matched with product sales by the coupon redemption subsystem **104** (step **528**). Information regarding properly redeemed coupons may be stored
10 in the coupon redemption subsystem **104** (step **540**). A report summarizing the redemption information may then be provided to the manufacturer (step **544**). Preferably, each manufacturer is provided with information concerning the redemption of coupons authorized by the manufacturer in question.

With reference now to **Fig. 6**, the steps taken in accordance with one embodiment of
15 the present invention in order to verify the proper redemption of coupons are illustrated in detail. At step **600**, the discounts and product sales entered in the point-of-sale subsystem **112** and downloaded to the coupon redemption subsystem **104** are compared to the audit or verifying coupons that have been input (e.g. read or scanned) into the coupon redemption subsystem **104** (step **600**).

20 The audit or verifying coupons being accessed were placed in the secure storage container by a person manually carrying the verifying coupons from each check-out station to the location having the secure storage container. In one embodiment, the cashier or other

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retailer employee manually carries redeemed coupons to be verified for insertion or other placement into the secure storage container, although an employee of the third party verifying entity might perform this task. When all coupons in the secure storage container are properly redeemed coupons, the audit coupons are the same as the redeemed coupons.

- 5 That is, when coupons are being properly redeemed, there should be no difference between the audit coupons placed in the secure storage container and the redeemed coupons. However, it can occur that there is a difference between the redeemed coupons and the audit coupons. For example, store personnel, such as the cashier, may place in the secure storage container one or more coupons that are not properly redeemed coupons. Such placement
10 could occur inadvertently or intentionally. In such a case, such an audit coupon was probably not scanned by the retailer's scanner.

After such information is received, the coupon redemption subsystem **104** then determines whether there is a match between the discount extended, a product sale, and a redeemed coupon (step **604**). Generally, a valid match occurs where the amount of the
15 discount is equal to the face value of the coupon, the consumer transaction includes the sale of a product for which the redeemed coupon was issued, and an audit or verifying coupon has been scanned into the coupon redemption subsystem **104** by the third party verification personnel. Accordingly, the coupon redemption subsystem **104** correlates the information scanned into that subsystem by the third party verification personnel to product sale and
20 discount information downloaded from the point-of-sale subsystem **112**.

If a proper match is found to exist between the information from the point-of-sale subsystem **112** and the input coupon information, the face amount of the redeemed coupon

may be paid to the retailer by the third party verifier or verification service (step 608). Concurrent with or prior to payment of the face value of the redeemed coupons to the retailer, ownership of the verifying coupons is transferred from the retailer to the third party verification service (step 608).

5 At step 612, a report of the redeemed coupons is provided to the retailer. This report may include information identifying the product and face value of the coupon, and any other information that has been downloaded from the point-of-sale subsystem 112 or scanned or otherwise entered into the coupon redemption subsystem 104 during the coupon verification process. According to one embodiment of the present invention, the report of redeemed
10 coupons, a release of the verifying coupons transferring ownership of those coupons from the retailer to the third party verification service, and a check are printed using the printer 332 of the coupon redemption subsystem 104 at the close of the coupon redemption session. An example of a combined retailer report, release and check is illustrated in Fig. 7. Accordingly, payment of the amounts by which the retailer has properly discounted sales to
15 consumers in response to the receipt of valid coupons may be made immediately following the coupon verification process, and closely following acceptance of the coupon by the retailer. For instance, where the verification process is conducted daily, reimbursement for discounts extended to consumers by the retailer can be provided to the retailer daily. Alternatively, a check may be issued by a central office of the coupon verification service,
20 or an electronic funds transfer may be made. Reimbursement is made to the retailer within at least ten days of the completion of the coupon verification process and, preferably, within five days of the retailer crediting the customer for the coupon amount. More preferably,

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payment is made to the retailer immediately (same day or next day) following completion of the verification process.

According to one embodiment of the present invention, information concerning the redemption of coupons may be transmitted from the CPU **300** of the coupon redemption subsystem **104** to a data center **124** over the second communication channel **116**. Preferably, the data center **124** collects and collates information received from various coupon redemption subsystems **104**. The third party verification service may then provide each manufacturer with a comprehensive report of coupon redemptions. These reports may contain any of the information downloaded to, scanned by, or otherwise collected by the coupon redemption system **104** (step **612**). According to one embodiment of the present invention, the information stored in the data center **124** may be accessible by the manufacturer directly. For instance, manufacturers may be allowed to search the data center using a connection established over the Internet. Alternatively, reports may be prepared by the third party verification service and provided to the manufacturer. According to one embodiment of the present invention, the manufacturer may specify the format of and information included in the provided report. For instance, the manufacturer may request information concerning selected time periods or regions of various scope. The manufacturer may also request information concerning particular retailers, stores or even lanes in a store. Information on the report may also be limited to particular categories or product codes. Additionally, information regarding redeemed coupons may be limited to particular family, offer or value codes. The report may also include coupons verified electronically and/or manually.

Within the general queries formulated by selecting items such as those described above, the returned information may be subdivided into various groupings. For instance, the information may be grouped according to the time period, region, retailer, product, coupon or clearing method. Furthermore, reports may be requested in summary form, or as complete 5 listings.

In order to obtain reimbursement for amounts paid to retailers on behalf of the product manufacturers, as illustrated in **Fig. 9**, the third party verification service may provide an invoice to each product manufacturer. The invoice may summarize such items as the number of coupons verified, the total face value of the coupons, a calculation of the 10 redemption fee, and a total amount owed to the third party verification service. In addition to providing such information for the period covered by the invoice (*e.g.* a single day), the invoice may provide year-to-date information. A report, as described above, may be enclosed with the invoice.

Optionally, the manufacturer may also be provided with the original verifying 15 coupons. If the manufacturer desires, it may conduct its own audit of the verifying coupons and the report of discounts paid for by the third party verification service.

Following receipt of the invoice, the manufacturer may make payment to the third party verification service in the amount of the face value of the redeemed coupons, plus the handling fee (**step 616**).

If at **step 604** a match cannot be made among a discount, product sale and an input 20 coupon, the verifying coupons are sent to the manufacturer for processing (**step 620**). The processing by the manufacturer may comprise the steps conventionally taken by the

manufacturer to verify the proper redemption of coupons. Accordingly, the provision of verifying coupons to the manufacturer may comprise the provision of all un-matched coupons relating to the manufacturer to the manufacturer's agent for examination. In addition, the manufacturer or manufacturer's agent may be provided with information collected by the point-of-sale system **112** and/or information entered into the coupon redemption system **104**. For instance, such information may be provided to a coupon redemption authority **120** using the second communications channel **116**.

If the manufacturer decides to accept the coupon (step **624**) the third party verification service receives the face value of the accepted coupon plus a handling fee (step **628**). The face value of the accepted coupons may then be paid by the third party verification service to the retailer (step **632**). A manufacturer may choose to accept an improperly redeemed coupon for a variety of reasons. For instance, the manufacturer may wish to maintain cordial relationships with its retailers. In addition, in view of the detailed sales information that may be provided by the present invention, even in connection with redemptions not verified by the third party service, the manufacturer may find that consumers are redeeming coupons intended for particular product configurations for alternate configurations. For example, the manufacturer may issue a coupon intended only for a product in a particular packaging configuration or in particular flavor, but may nonetheless honor the coupon if redeemed in connection with the sale of the product in some other package or flavor. In addition to using the detailed sales information for determining whether a redemption was "close enough," the manufacturer may also use the information

to persuade the retailer to stock a particular flavor or product configuration, thereby allowing the manufacturer to increase the amount of shelf space allocated to it in the retailer's store.

If at step **624** the manufacturer does not accept the particular coupon that was audited, no payment is made to the third party verification service, and accordingly no payment is
5 made to the retailer in connection with the redemption of the rejected coupon (step **636**). In another embodiment, the third party verifier may decide unilaterally to reimburse the retailer for the unverified coupon. In such a case, the third party verifier may seek reimbursement from the manufacturer by providing the manufacturer with a report that identifies such an unverified coupon.

10 It can be appreciated that some overlap may occur between product sales recorded in the point of sale subsystem **112** and the audit coupons removed from the secure storage container by the coupon verification personnel. For example, and in particular where product sales information is downloaded at the time the coupon verification personnel arrive at the retailer, or where such information is provided to the coupon redemption system **104**
15 continuously, discounts extended by the retailer to consumers may be entered in the point of sale system **112** that do not have corresponding audit coupons in the secure storage container. For example, information may have been downloaded to the coupon redemption system **104** before the cashier (or other individual) has had the opportunity to place the redeemed coupon associated with such a sale in the secure storage container (which
20 redeemed coupon then becomes the verifying or audit coupon) for review by the coupon verification personnel. In such instances, product sales and associated discounts for which

no match with an audit coupon was made may be retained in the coupon redemption subsystem **104** until a subsequent coupon verification session.

A further explanation of such overlap is provided by the following example. Assume that the coupon redemption subsystem **104** conducts a first audit session of a first plurality of coupons and then conducts a second audit session of a second plurality of coupons. The first plurality of coupons includes a number of sets of audit coupons, with each set being associated with a different customer and a corresponding different transaction involving one or more coupons for that customer. Likewise, the second plurality of coupons includes a number of sets of coupons, with each set involving a different customer redeeming one or 10 more coupons. At a desired or predetermined time at which these first plurality of coupons are located in the secure storage container, the coupon verification entity removes all of these first plurality of coupons for verification using the coupon redemption subsystem **104**. During the time that the coupon redemption subsystem **104** is conducting its verification process associated with the first plurality of coupons, the POS subsystem **112**, as an example, 15 inputs or otherwise provides coupon information for a number of customers totaling ten different coupons. Consequently, the coupon redemption system **104** has coupon information for at least ten coupons for which there will be no match or correspondence with the coupons then being audited during the first audit session. The coupon information for each of these ten coupons is stored in a properly identified file or storage area for subsequent 20 access and comparison during the second audit session involving the second plurality of audit coupons. In that regard, it is anticipated that the second plurality of audit coupons includes coupons having information corresponding to the overlap coupon information that

is kept in the properly identified storage area of the coupon redemption subsystem **104**. As a result, such previously stored information is also invoked or relied on in conducting the verifying procedures or steps previously discussed. In the present example, the ten coupons for which there was no match or correspondence during the first audit session are taken into account during the second audit session. Under usual circumstances, the coupon information associated with each of these ten coupons is expected to be matched with the audit coupons that are part of the second audit session. As can be understood, there may be overlap coupon information input from the POS subsystem **112** during each of the coupon audit sessions conducted by the coupon redemption subsystem **104**, with such overlap coupon information to be taken into account during one or more later coupon audit sessions.

With reference now to **Fig. 8**, the flow of information between the parties involved in the redemption of a coupon according to the present invention is illustrated. Initially, the manufacturer **800** issues or authorizes the issuance of coupons to the consumer **804**. The consumer selects the coupons that he or she wishes to use, and redeems them in connection with the purchase of a product **808**. At step **812**, the retailer extends a discount to the consumer in the amount of the face value of the coupon and takes possession of the coupon. Audit or verifying coupons are then provided to the third party verification service for verification of proper redemption **816**. Information collected during the verification process is stored in the data center **120** (step **820**) and made available to the manufacturer. Accordingly, the manufacturer is provided with feedback concerning the redemption of authorized coupons. This feedback allows the manufacturer to adjust its promotions in response to consumer demand. The feedback to the manufacturer by the present invention

is provided very quickly, as the information concerning the coupon redemption is collected electronically, and may, according to one embodiment, be accessed by the manufacturer almost immediately following collection.

In accordance with the present invention, methods and apparatus for verifying the proper redemption of manufacturer coupons are provided. The invention in its broader aspects relates to an economical method and apparatus for providing detailed information concerning the redemption of coupons shortly after redemption takes place. In addition, such methods and apparatus allow the prompt reimbursement of retailers for discounts extended to consumers in connection with the use of coupons.

The foregoing discussion of the invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. Further, the description is not intended to limit the invention to the forms disclosed herein. Consequently, variations and modifications commensurate with the above teachings, within the skill and knowledge of the relevant art, are within the scope of the present invention. The embodiments described hereinabove are further intended to explain the best mode presently known of practicing the invention and to enable others skilled in the art to utilize the invention in such or in other embodiments and with various modifications required by their application or use of the invention. It is intended that the appended claims be construed to include alternative embodiments to the extent permitted by the prior art.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for handling coupons, comprising:
 - redeeming at a first location a plurality of input coupons including at least first and second input coupons during a first time interval using a main computer system including
 - 5 a first coupon input device;
 - transporting to a second location a plurality of verifying coupons to an auxiliary computer system including an auxiliary coupon input device, said verifying coupons being the same as said input coupons when said redeeming step is properly conducted, said transporting step being conducted within five days of said redeeming step;
 - 10 making a determination related to whether said redeeming step was properly conducted using said auxiliary computer system and said plurality of verifying coupons; and reimbursing for at least some of said plurality of input coupons, said reimbursing step being conducted within five days of said making step.
2. A method, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:
 - said main computer system is located at a retailer facility and said auxiliary computer system is also located at said retailer facility.
3. A method, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:
 - said auxiliary computer system includes a secure lock box and said transporting step includes carrying said plurality of verifying coupons from a first checkout station located at a first retailer facility to said auxiliary computer system at predetermined intervals, wherein
 - 5 said plurality of verifying coupons are placed in said secure lock box.

4. A method, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

 said reimbursing step includes reimbursing an acceptor of said plurality of input coupons.

5. A method, as claimed in Claim 4, wherein:

 said acceptor includes a retailer having a retailer facility and said reimbursing step includes providing money to the retailer to compensate the retailer related to said at least some of said plurality of input coupons before said at least some of said plurality of coupons
5 are transferred from the retailer facility.

6. A method, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

 said main computer system and said auxiliary computer system are located at a retailer facility having at least a first check-out station, said transporting step includes manually carrying said plurality of verifying coupons from adjacent said first check-out
5 station to an area in said retailer facility having said auxiliary computer system, and said reimbursing step includes providing a money payment to the retailer related to said at least some of said plurality of input coupons.

7. A method, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

 said making a determination step includes determining whether a match exists between said plurality of input coupons and said plurality of verifying coupons, wherein said plurality of verifying coupons are input to said auxiliary coupon input device during said
5 making a determination step and also includes determining whether a match exists between said plurality of verifying coupons and a number of products obtained when said plurality of input coupons were redeemed.

8. A method, as claimed in Claim 7, wherein:

when said determining step determines that a match does not exist between each of said verifying coupons and said number of products, ascertaining whether reimbursement is to be provided for each of said verifying coupon that is non-matched.

9. A method, as claimed in Claim 8, wherein:

said ascertaining step includes inquiring of a retailer involved with said redeeming step whether to reimburse and making a decision whether or not to reimburse the retailer.

10. A method, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

said making a determination step includes determining whether a match exists related to said plurality of input coupons using information from said main computer system related to additional coupons that were redeemed and which are different from said plurality of input coupons, said additional coupons being redeemed after said first time interval.

5

11. A method, as claimed in Claim 10, further including:

maintaining in storage memory said information related to said additional coupons and using said information related to said additional coupons when utilizing a second plurality of input coupons.

12. A method, as claimed in Claim 7, further including:

generating first information related to a match between said plurality of input coupons and said plurality of verifying coupons and generating second information related to a non-match between said plurality of input coupons and said plurality of verifying coupons.

5

13. A method, as claimed in Claim 8, further including:

generating third information related to reimbursing for at least one of said verifying coupons for which there is no match with said plurality of input coupons.

14. A method, as claimed in Claim 8, further including:

generating fourth information related to at least one of said verifying coupons for which there was no match with said plurality of input coupons and for which no reimbursement was made.

15. A method, as claimed in Claim 1, further including:

storing information related to identities of said plurality of input coupons by name of retailer that accepted said plurality of input coupons and by name of a manufacturer associated with each of said plurality of input coupons.

16. A method, as claimed in Claim 1, further including:

after said reimbursing step, sending said at least some of said plurality of input coupons to a manufacturing agent or a manufacturer and without sending them to a clearinghouse involved with clearing coupons.

17. A method, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

said making a determination step is conducted after a number of product transactions involving a number of different customers and in which said plurality of input coupons are provided by said number of different customers.

18. A system involved with handling coupons, comprising:

a main computer subsystem including a coupon input device located at a first location
that provides input coupon information from a first plurality of input coupons, said input
coupon information including identification information related to identifying said first
5 plurality of input coupons and product information related to products purchased; and

an auxiliary computer subsystem that receives said input coupon information from
said main computer subsystem, said auxiliary computer subsystem including an auxiliary
coupon input device located at a second location and at least a first processor, said auxiliary
coupon input device receiving a first plurality of verifying coupons related to determining
10 whether correspondence exists with said first plurality of input coupons, said first processor
used in determining whether a match exists between said first plurality of input coupons and
said first plurality of verifying coupons, said auxiliary coupon input device inputting coupon
information to said auxiliary computer subsystem during a time different from said auxiliary
computer subsystem receiving said input coupon information from said main computer
15 subsystem.

19. A system, as claimed in Claim 18, wherein:

said auxiliary computer subsystem is in communication with said main computer
subsystem and receives said input coupon information from said main computer subsystem,
said auxiliary computer subsystem also receiving additional coupon information related to
5 additional coupons different from said first plurality of input coupons, said first processor
taking into account said additional coupon information when determining whether a match
exists between said first plurality of input coupons and said first plurality of verifying
coupons.

20. A system, as claimed in Claim 19, wherein:
said additional coupon information is used by said first processor when determining whether a match exists between a second plurality of input coupons and a second plurality of verifying coupons.

21. A system, as claimed in Claim 18, wherein:
said auxiliary computer subsystem includes storage memory for storing first information related to a match between at least a first input coupon of said first plurality of input coupons and a first verifying coupon of said first plurality of verifying coupons and for
5 storing second information related to a non-match involving at least one of a second input coupon of said first plurality of input coupons and a second verifying coupon of said first plurality of verifying coupons.

22. A method, as claimed in Claim 21, wherein:
said storage memory stores third information related to whether a reimbursement was made for said second verifying coupon of said first plurality of verifying coupons.

23. A system, as claimed in Claim 18, wherein:
said auxiliary computer subsystem includes check printing hardware that provides a check used to reimburse the retailer having said main computer subsystem for at least some of said first plurality of input coupons.

- 000220-0000
24. A method involving the handling of coupons, comprising:
- providing a main computer subsystem at a facility of a retailer and an auxiliary computer subsystem in communication with said main computer subsystem, said main computer subsystem including at least a first coupon input device and said auxiliary computer subsystem including at least an auxiliary coupon input device;
- 5 inputting during a first time interval a first plurality of input coupons for redemption using said first coupon input device, each of said first plurality of input coupons including input coupon information;
- 10 communicating said input coupon information related to at least said first plurality of input coupons to said auxiliary computer subsystem using said main computer subsystem;
- transporting a first plurality of verifying coupons to said auxiliary computer subsystem, said first plurality of verifying coupons to be used in determining whether said first plurality of verifying coupons correspond to said first plurality of input coupons in kind and number;
- 15 reading said first plurality of verifying coupons using said auxiliary coupon input device;
- determining whether there is correspondence between each of said first plurality of verifying coupons and at least one of said first plurality of input coupons using said input 20 coupon information; and
- reimbursing the retailer for at least some of said first plurality of input coupons.

25. A method, as claimed in Claim 24, further including:

withholding reimbursement to the retailer for at least one of said first plurality of input coupons when said determining steps determines that there is no correspondence

between said at least one input coupon of said first plurality of input coupons and said first
5 plurality of verifying coupons.

26. A method, as claimed in Claim 24, wherein:

said communicating step includes communicating additional coupon information related to additional coupons different from said first plurality of input coupons before completing said determining step and in which said determining step does not rely on said
5 additional coupon information when determining whether each of said first plurality of verifying coupons corresponds to at least one of said first plurality of input coupons.

27. A method, as claimed in Claim 24, wherein:

said auxiliary computer subsystem is located at the facility of the retailer and said reimbursing step includes printing a check made out to the retailer or providing an electronic fund transfer to the retailer within five days of conducting said inputting step.

28. A method, as claimed in Claim 24, wherein:

shipping said first plurality of input coupons to at least one agent of manufacturers or a manufacturer associated with said first plurality of input coupons under the responsibility of a party independent of the retailer and without clearing said first plurality
5 of input coupons by a coupon clearinghouse.

29. A method, as claimed in Claim 24, wherein:

when said determining step determines that no correspondence exists involving said products purchased during said time interval and said first plurality of verifying coupons, ascertaining whether reimbursement is to be provided to the retailer.

30. A method, as claimed in Claim 24, wherein:

said reimbursing step includes transferring ownership rights to a third party independent of the retailer before said at least some of said plurality input coupons are removed from the retailer facility.

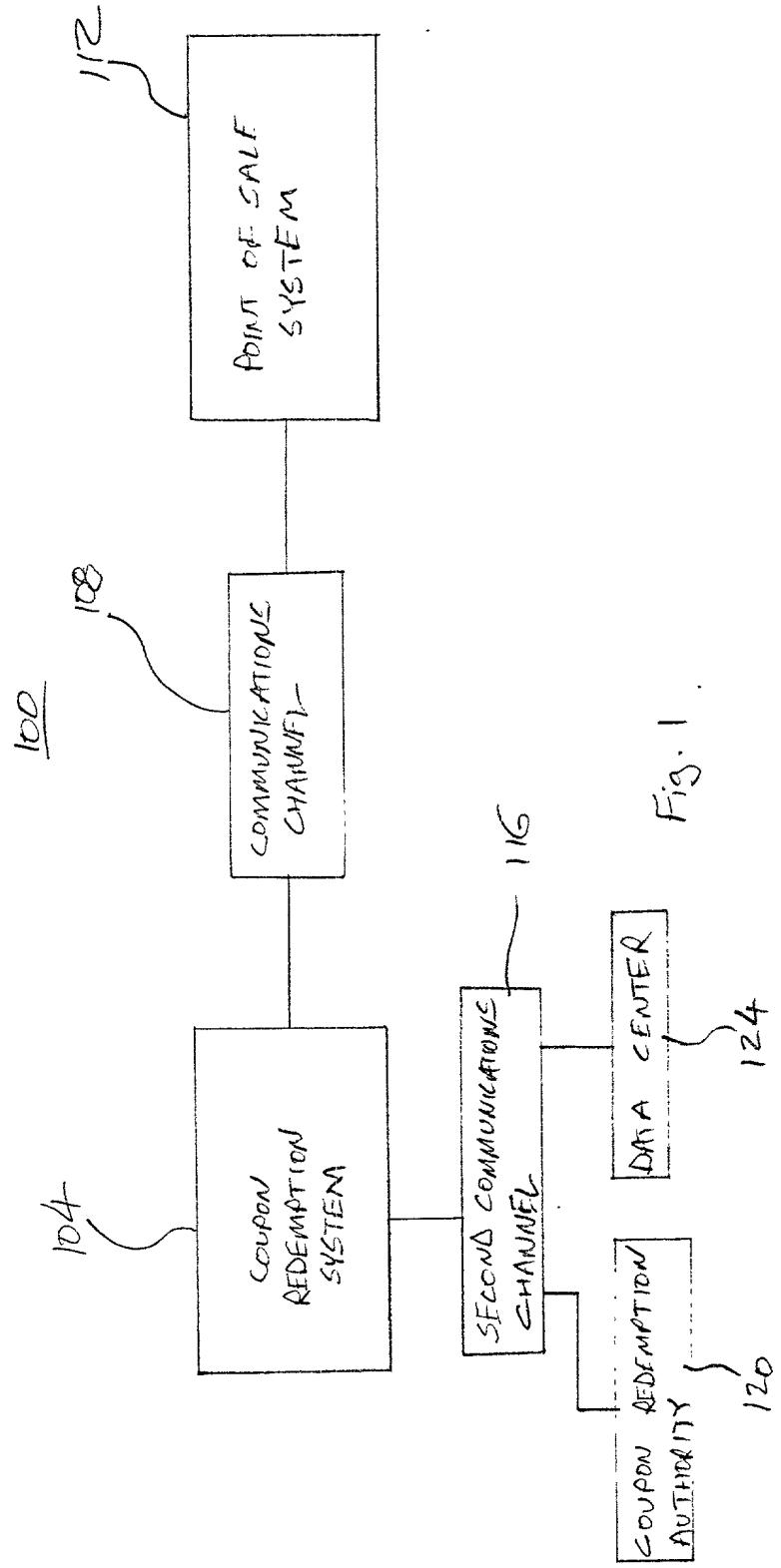
31. A method, as claimed in Claim 24, further including:

submitting an invoice for payment, to at least one manufacturer or a manufacturer's agent associated with said at least some of said first plurality of input coupons, by a third party who is independent of the retailer and after the third party has received ownership
5 rights for said at least some of said first plurality of input coupons.

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ABSTRACT

Method and apparatus for accurately collecting and promptly reporting information in connection with the redemption of manufacturer coupons are provided. The method includes the collection of information from a retailer point-of-sale system, and the 5 examination of redeemed coupons. Where matches between product sales, discounts to consumers and redeemed coupons can be made, payment to the retailer of discounts extended to consumers in exchange for manufacturer authorized coupons is immediately made following such verification. In addition, information concerning the redemption of coupons is made available to manufacturers to enable them to adjust promotions to achieve the 10 desired marketing effect. The apparatus of the present invention may comprise a central processing unit and attached peripherals capable of interfacing with a retailer point-of-sale system and downloading information from the point-of-sale system, together with secure storage for holding coupons that are to be verified by the apparatus.



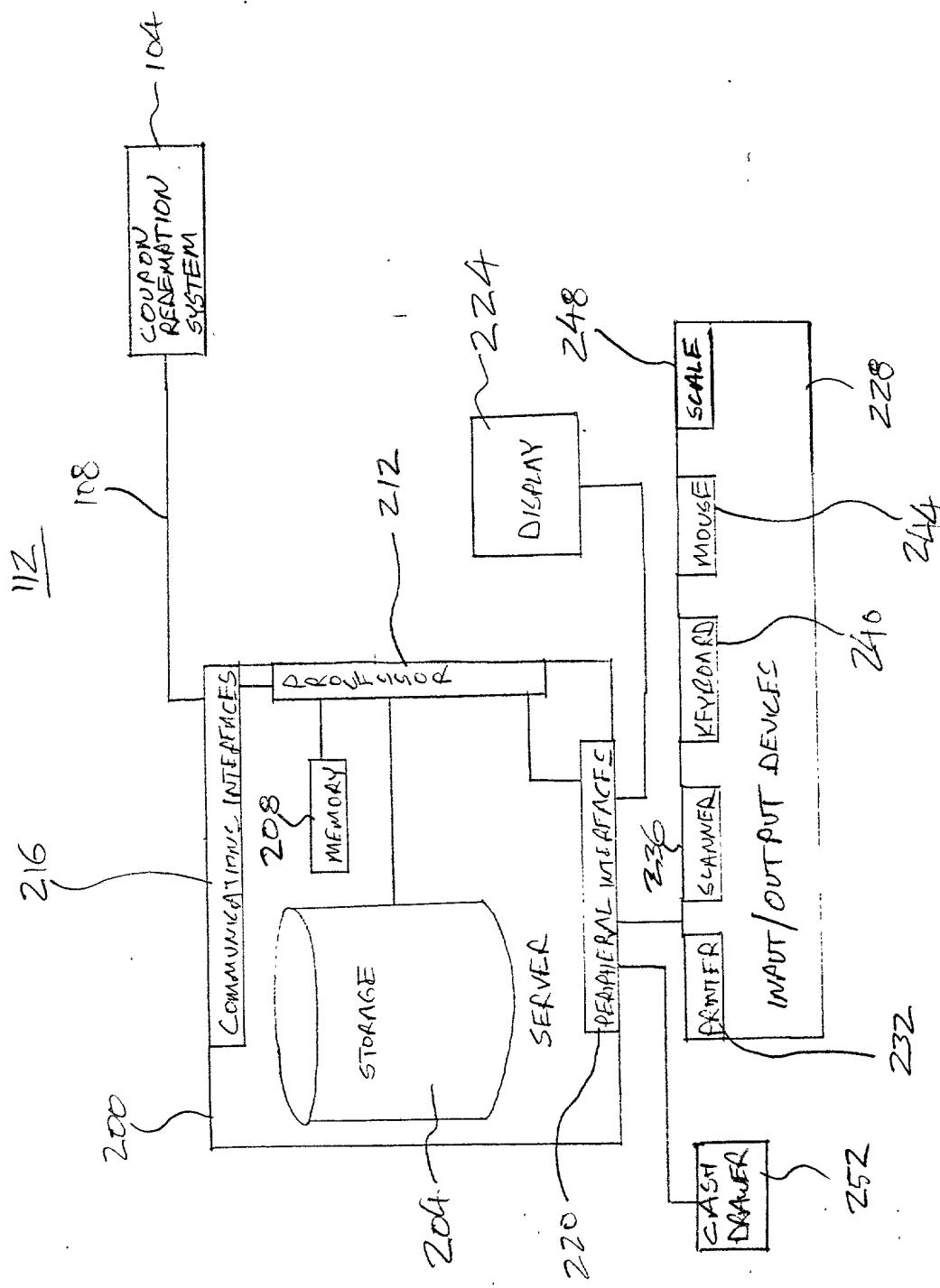


Fig. 2

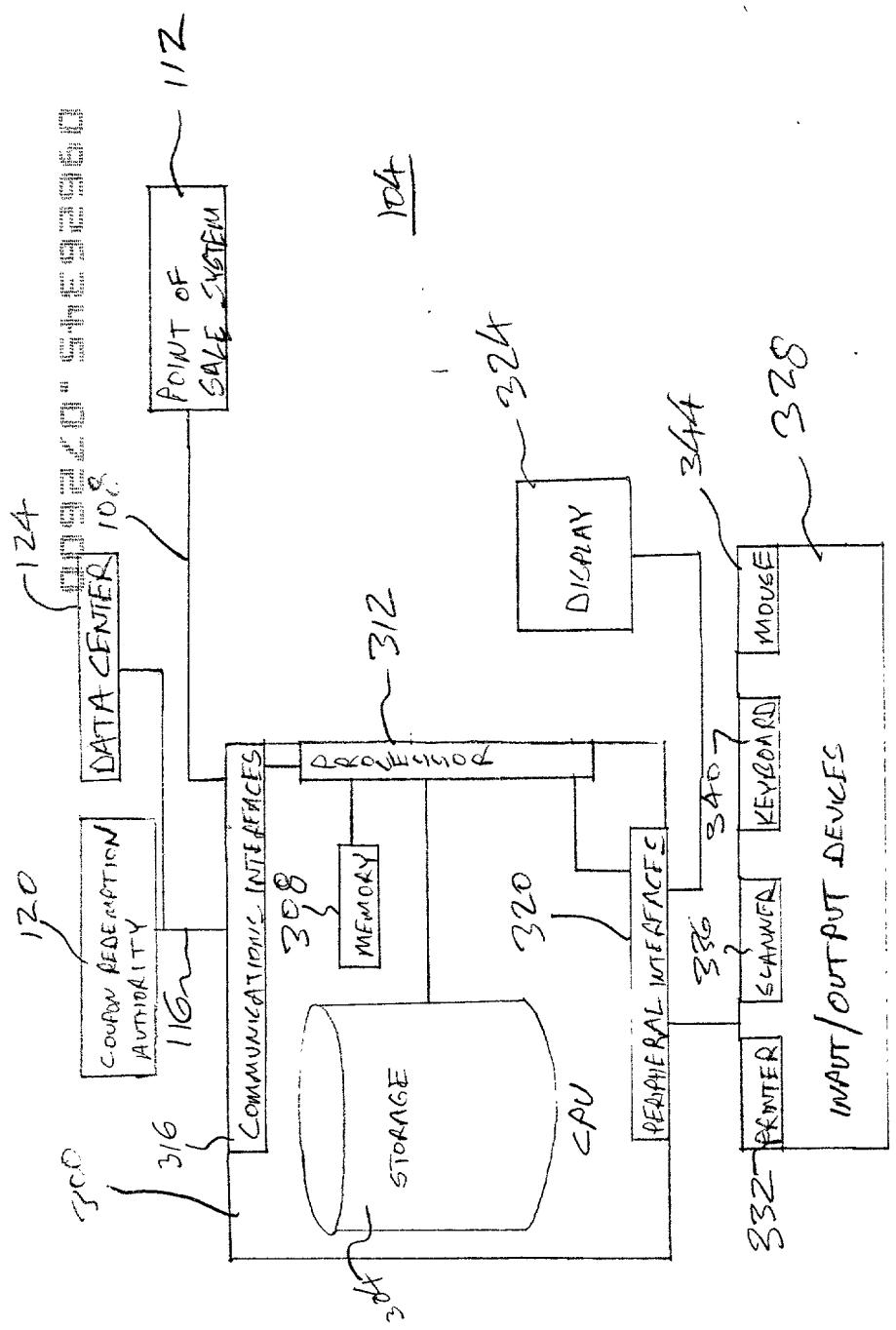


Fig. 3

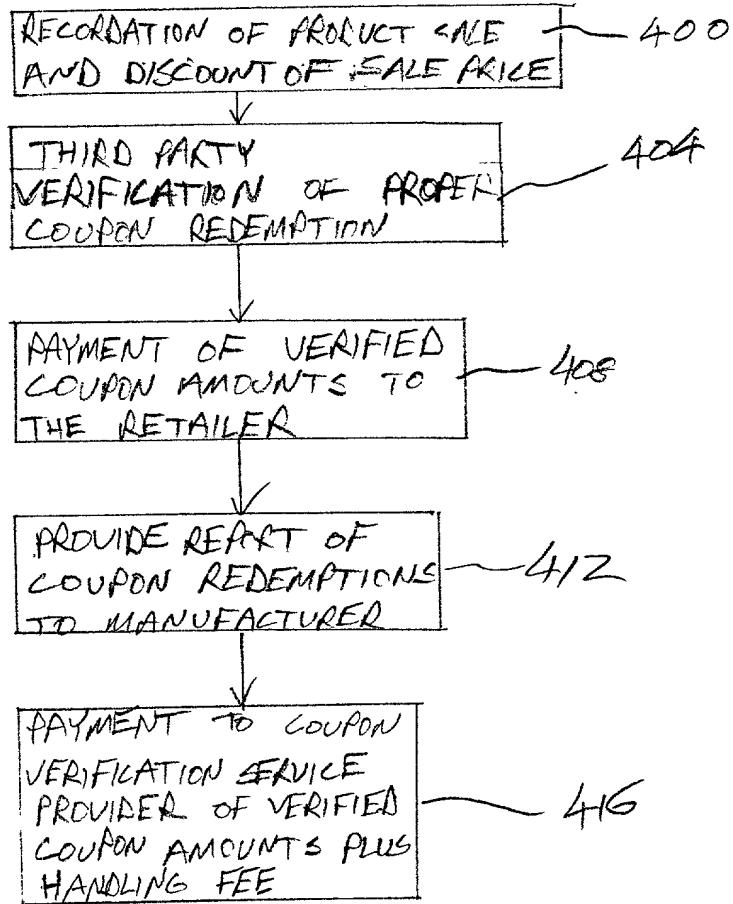


Fig. 4

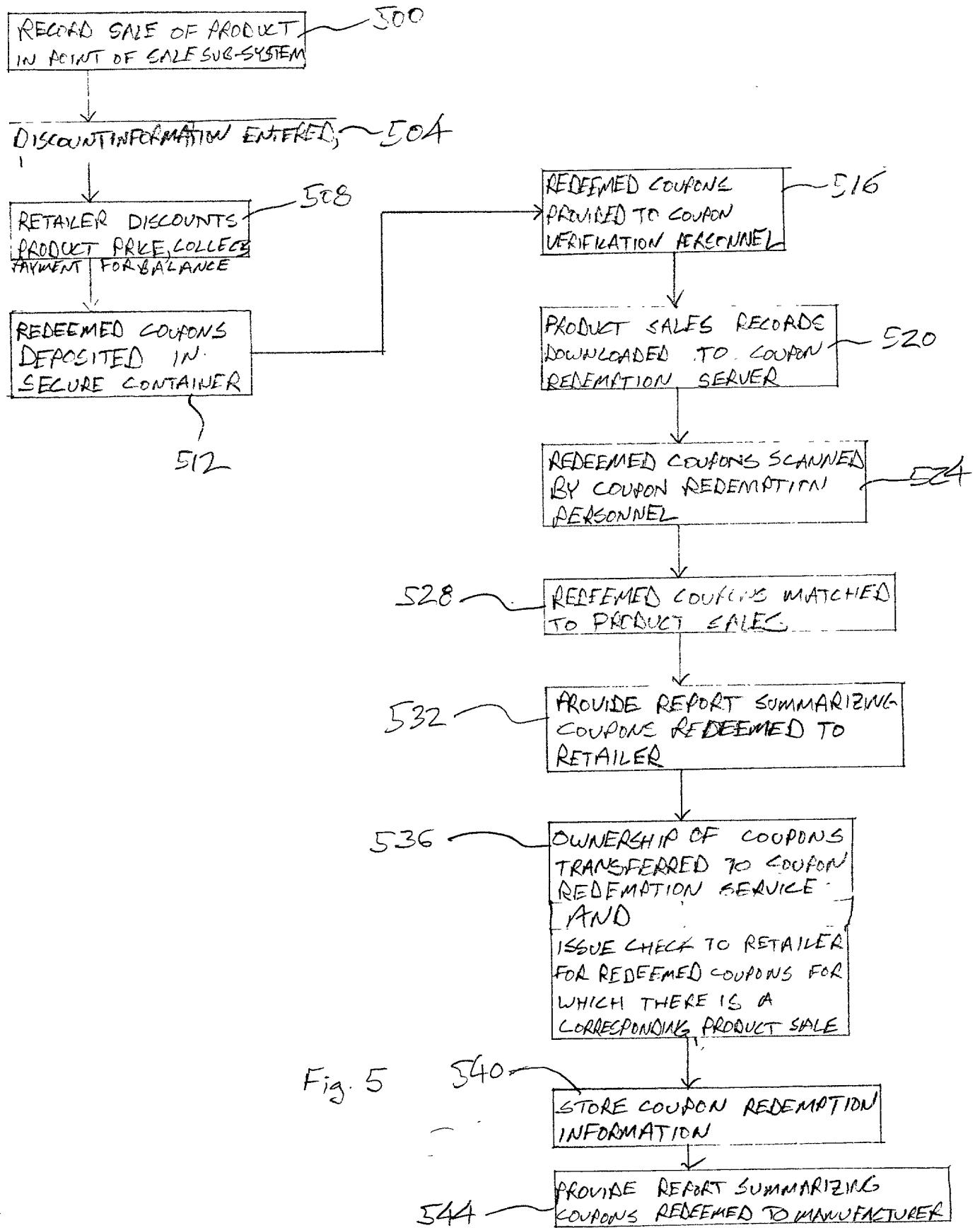


Fig. 5

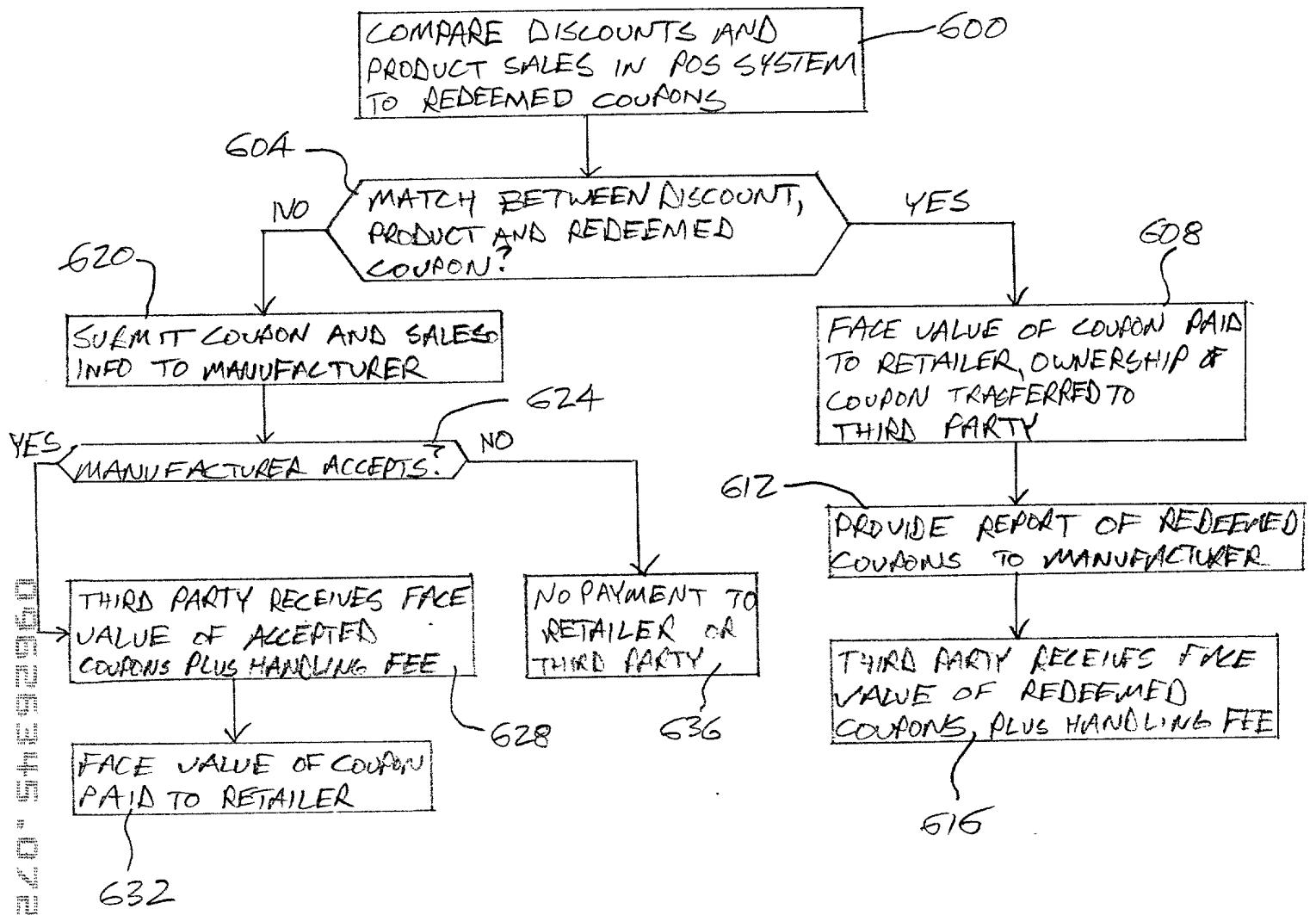


Fig.6

THE FIRST COUPON BANK

1422 EAST BATAVIA DRIVE, AURORA, CO 80011

303-344-4680 303-344-4684 (0)

COUPON COLLECTION

Collected from Store #: 99999

Schulze's Techno.Mart
1422 EAST BATAVIA DRIVE, AURORA, CO 80011
303-344-4680Store Manager: John Smith
Assistant Manager: Judy Jones
Head Clerk: Miss Martin
Head Clerk: Jessica Harper**COUPON SUMMARY**

START:	11:30A, 1/26/00	STOP:	11:55A, 1/27/00
NUMBER	VALUE		
Scan Count	\$617.40		
POS Count	\$676.50		
Plus/(Minus)	(\$59.10)		

Collected By: Joe Serviceman

Check #: 99999900001 Amount: \$617.40

1623 EAST BATAVIA DRIVE, AURORA, CO 80011
303-344-4680 303-344-4684 (1)**COUPON COLLECTION**

Collected from Store #: 99999

Schulze's Techno.Mart
1422 EAST BATAVIA DRIVE, AURORA, CO 80011
303-344-4680Store Manager: John Smith
Assistant Manager: Judy Jones
Head Clerk: Miss Martin
Head Clerk: Jessica Harper**COUPON SUMMARY**

START:	11:30A, 1/26/00	STOP:	11:55A, 1/27/00
NUMBER	VALUE		
Scan Count	\$617.40		
POS Count	\$676.50		
Plus/(Minus)	(\$59.10)		

Collected By: Joe Serviceman

Check #: 99999900001 Amount: \$617.40

SCHULZE'S TECHNO.MART
 certifies that the coupons collected were redeemed only by our
 customer's for the specified brands, size, service, and quantity
 and for combination thereof. It also indicated on the face of the
 coupon, and that the face amount of each coupon was deducted from
 the total selling price at the time of purchase. Our customers were not
 underwriting the coupons redeemed by our customers were not
 reproduced or shared in any way, they were redeemed prior to the
 expiration date, and our customers were the original recipients of the
 coupon. This is a Bill of Sale to In Store Media Systems, Inc. (ISMSI)
 for the coupons collected. All rights, title, and interest in these coupons
 are granted to ISMSI, including the right to resell them, the value of
 the coupons, and all other applicable reimbursement provisions of the
 manufacturer's coupon redemption policy.

APPROVAL:

Signature of Authorized Representative

Name (please print)

Date

Signature of Authorized Representative

Name (please print)

Date

Signature

Star Copy

Signature

Our Copy

Signature

Store Check

** VOID AFTER 90 DAYS **

ISMSI

IN STORE MEDIA SYSTEMS, INC.
1423 EAST BATAVIA DRIVE, AURORA, CO 80011

9-99999-0000001

DATE 01/03/00

PAY TO THE ORDER OF Schulze's Techno.Mart

\$ 617.40

SIX HUNDRED SEVENTEEN and 40/100

DOLLARS

NORWEST BANK COLORADO
1450 SOUTH MAYANA STREET
AURORA, CO 80012-4018*Everett E. Schulze, Jr.*

Everett E. Schulze, Jr.

15163003911:1201234567#9999990000001#

Fig.7

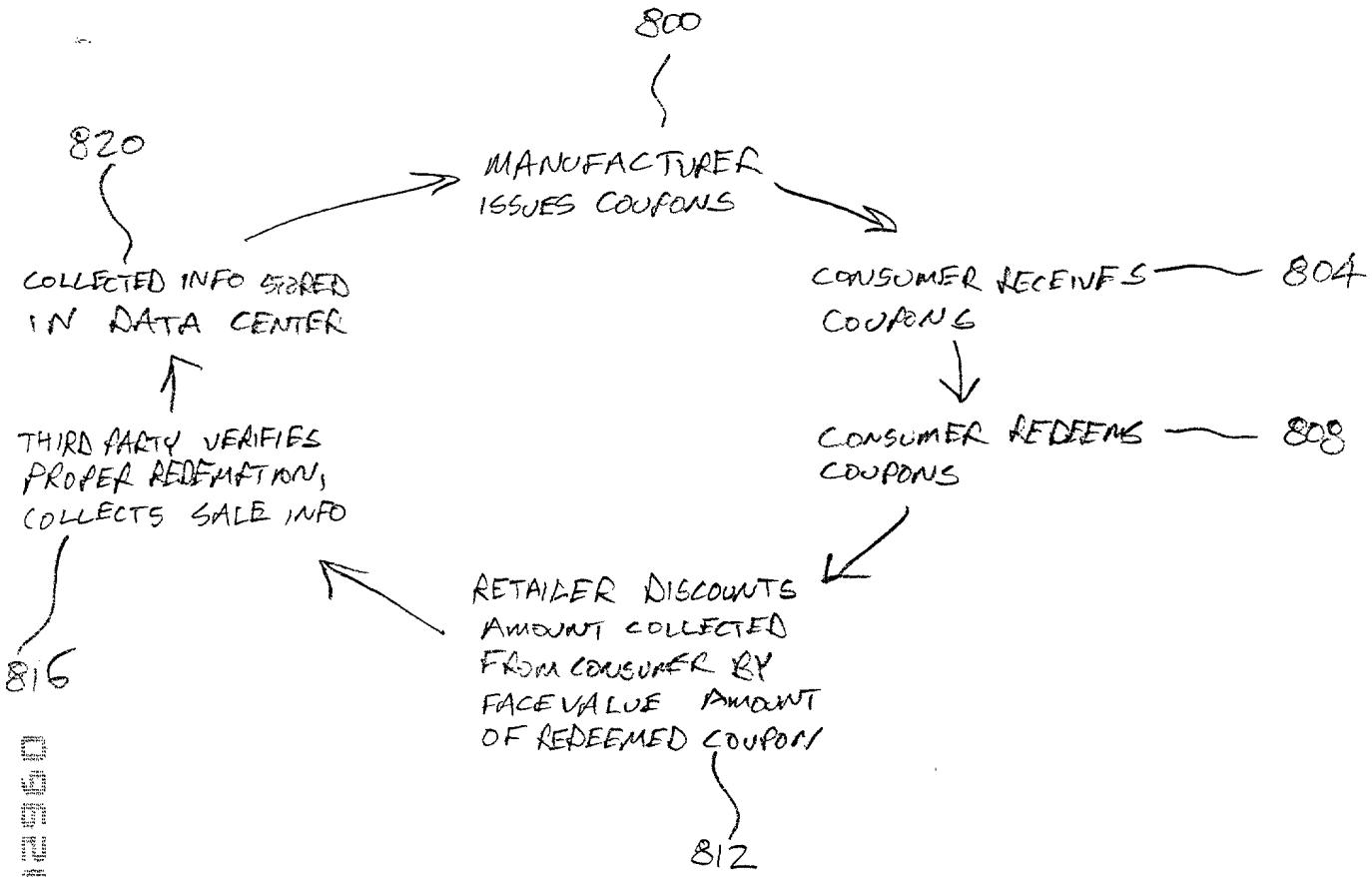


Fig. 8

IN STORE MEDIA SYSTEMS, INC.

Manufacturer/Distributor of the Coupon Exchange Center System

15423 East Batavia Drive
Aurora, Colorado 80011
Tel: 303-364-6550 Fax: 303-364-6564
Email: instoremedia@uswest.net

INVOICE

Invoice Number: xyz13211-265
Date: 9/23/99

TO: XYZ Package Good Manufacturer, Inc.
Happy Trails Road
Manufacturersville NJ 65432
Attn: William Sargrave

From: In Store Media Systems, Inc.
16423 East Batavia Drive
Aurora CO 80011

Number of Coupons Cleared on 9/22/99	1,051,700
Total Face Value Redeemed on 9/22/99	\$ 618,029.57
Total Redemption Fee Earned on 9/22/99	\$ 84,136.00
Total Due and Payable	<hr/> \$ 702,165.57
Total Products Sold on 9/22/99	53,278,137
Number of Coupons Redeemed as a % of Sales	2.0%

Number of Coupons Redeemed, Year-to-Date	278,700,500
Total Face Value Redeemed, Year-to-Date	\$ 163,777,836.05
Total Redemption Fee Earned, Year-to-Date	\$ 22,296,040.00
Total Year-to-Date	<hr/> \$ 186,073,876.05

Please Make EFT Payments to:
Commercial World Bank
c/o In Store Media Systems, Inc.

Payment Authorized by _____ Date _____

Fig. 9

RULE 63 (37 CFR 1.63)
DECLARATION
FOR PATENT APPLICATION
IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that my residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name, and I believe that, I am an original, first and sole inventor of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled "PROMPT COUPON REIMBURSEMENT AFTER COUPON REDEMPTION", the specification of which is identified as Attorney File No. 2937-18 and attached hereto.

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above. I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability in accordance with 37 CFR 1.56(a) and (b) as set forth on the attached sheet indicated Page 2 hereof and which I have read.

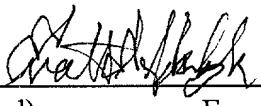
I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under 35 U.S.C. 119/365 of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate listed below and have also identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed:

Prior Foreign Application(s) <u>Number</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Day/Month/Year Filed</u>	Priority Claimed <u>Yes</u> <u>No</u>
---	----------------	-----------------------------	--

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. 120/365 of all United States and PCT international applications listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in such prior applications in the manner provided by the first paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose information material to patentability in accordance with 37 CFR 1.56(a) and (b) which occurred between the filing date(s) of the prior application(s) and the national or PCT international filing date of this application:

<u>Application Serial No.</u>	<u>Filing Date</u>	<u>Status: patented, pending, abandoned</u>
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I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

- 1) Inventor's Signature  Date 7/24/00
Inventor's Name (typed): Everett E. Schulze, Jr.
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*Complete Post Office Address in full if different from Residence, otherwise indicate that the Post Office Address is "Same as Residence."

37 CFR §1.56(a) and (b)
DUTY TO DISCLOSE INFORMATION MATERIAL
TO PATENTABILITY

(a) A patent by its very nature is affected with a public interest. The public interest is best served, and the most effective patent examination occurs when, at the time an application is being examined, the Office is aware of and evaluates the teachings of all information material to patentability. Each individual associated with the filing and prosecution of a patent application has a duty of candor and good faith in dealing with the Office, which includes a duty to disclose to the Office all information known to that individual to be material to patentability as defined in this section. The duty to disclose information exists with respect to each pending claim until the claim is cancelled or withdrawn from consideration, or the application becomes abandoned. Information material to the patentability of a claim that is cancelled or withdrawn from consideration need not be submitted if the information is not material to the patentability of any claim remaining under consideration in the application. There is no duty to submit information which is not material to the patentability of any existing claim. The duty to disclose all information known to be material to patentability is deemed to be satisfied if all information known to be material to patentability of any claim issued in a patent was cited by the Office or submitted to the Office in the manner prescribed by §§1.97(b)-(d) and 1.98. However, no patent will be granted on an application in connection with which fraud on the Office was practiced or attempted or the duty of disclosure was violated through bad faith or intentional misconduct. The Office encourages applicants to carefully examine:

(1) prior art cited in search reports of a foreign patent office in a counterpart application, and

(2) the closest information over which individuals associated with the filing or prosecution of a patent application believe any pending claim patentably defines, to make sure that any material information contained therein is disclosed to the Office.

(b) Under this section, information is material to patentability when it is not cumulative to information already of record or being made of record in the application, and

(1) It establishes, by itself or in combination with other information, a prima facie case of unpatentability of a claim; or

(2) It refutes, or is inconsistent with, a position the applicant takes in:

(i) Opposing an argument of unpatentability relied on by the Office, or

(ii) Asserting an argument of a patentability.

A prima facie case of unpatentability is established when the information compels a conclusion that a claim is unpatentable under the preponderance of evidence, burden-of-proof standard, giving each term in the claim its broadest reasonable construction consistent with the specification, and before any consideration is given to evidence which may be submitted in an attempt to establish a contrary conclusion of patentability.*

*Note, 37 CFR §1.97(h) states: "The filing of an information disclosure statement shall not be construed to be an admission that the information cited in the statement is, or is considered to be, material to patentability as defined in §1.56(b)."

POWER OF ATTORNEY

On behalf of In-Store Media Systems, Inc., a Colorado corporation having a principal place of business at 15423 E. Batavia Dr., Aurora, Colorado 80011 being the assignee of and owning all right, title and interest in the invention entitled "PROMPT COUPON REIMBURSEMENT AFTER COUPON REDEMPTION", for which application for Letters Patent of the United States has been made by Everett E. Schulze, Jr., said application being identified as Attorney File No. 2937-18 and executed on even date herewith, I, Donald P. Uhl, President and CEO of In-Store Media Systems, Inc., hereby appoint David F. Zinger, Registration No. 29,127; Craig C. Groseth, Registration No. 31,713; Michael L. Tompkins, Registration No. 30,980; Sabrina C. Stavish, Registration No. 33,374; Todd P. Blakely, Registration No. 31,328; Lewis D. Hansen, Registration No. 35,536; Joseph E. Kovarik, Registration No. 33,005; Gary J. Connell, Registration No. 32,020; Wannell M. Crook, Registration No. 31,071; Douglas W. Swartz, Registration No. 37,739; Bruce A. Kugler, Registration No. 38,942; Robert R. Brunelli, Registration No. 39,617; Richard L. Hughes, Registration No. 31,264; Tejpal S. Hansra, Registration No. 38,172; Dana Hartje Cardwell, Registration No. 40,638; Angela Dallas-Pedretti, Registration No. 42,460; Benjamin B. Lieb, Registration No. 42,801; Bradley M. Knepper, Registration No. 44,189; Theresa A. Brown, Registration No. 32,547; Miriam R. Drickman, Registration No. 42,499; Dennis J. Dupray, Registration No. P-46,299, and Todd M. Petersen, Registration No. 45,580, of SHERIDAN ROSS P.C., 1560 Broadway, Suite 1200, Denver, Colorado 80202-5141, telephone number (303) 863-9700, as attorneys and agents for In-Store Media Systems, Inc. with full powers of substitution, association and revocation to prosecute the application and related U.S. and foreign applications and to transact all business in the United States Patent and Trademark Office and all foreign and international patent offices connected therewith.

By:



Donald P. Uhl
President and CEO

Dated: 7-25-00